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Ellsberg Says Nixon Tried Frogmen Ploy

By Chalmers M. Roberts
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MIAMI BEACH, Aug. 22—Daniel Ellsberg said here today that early in the Nixon administration American Navy frogmen were sent into Haiphong harbor as a warning of possible escalation to come if North Vietnam did not agree to a settlement of the war.

Ellsberg, whose trial for having released the Pentagon Papers has been suspended, appeared at a press conference sponsored by Rep. Paul N. McCloskey, the antiwar Republican. The California congressman said he called the conference because the war is "not even going to be debated" at the GOP National Convention.

During Mr. Nixon's first ten weeks in office, Ellsberg said, the frogmen were sent to Haiphong ostensibly to scout the problems of mining the harbor but more importantly "to be seen" by the North Vietnamese. Two other steps, also taken to serve as "signals" to Hanoi in the same period, he said, were the sending of American Marines into combat in Laos and the initial B-52 bombing of Communist forces in Cambodia.

Ellsberg said the three steps became known to him in mid-1969 and that witnesses at his trial would corroborate his statement. He did not say who had given him the information.

Ellsberg sought to show that Mr. Nixon, in the period between his election and inauguration, developed a plan for conduct of the war. Ellsberg

released copies of what he said was a non-classified study be available to the new President.

Ellsberg, then with the Rand Corp., said he had been asked by White House adviser Henry Kissinger, soon after his appointment, to head a team drafting the options paper. He said he discussed the paper with Kissinger at a 1968 Christmas Day meeting in New York's Hotel Pierre.

Out of this initial paper, said Ellsberg, came (1) a series of Kissinger questions that in turn produced the answers in what is known as National Security Action Memorandum Number one, which was disclosed earlier this year, and (2) a redrafted set of options presented to Mr. Nixon at his initial National Security Council meeting in January, 1969.

The options papers handed out to newsmen here today contained the familiar range of proposals, and descriptions of pro and con points, of the last winter of the Johnson administration. Option No. 7 in the spectrum was to pull out of Vietnam unconditionally. Ellsberg said that one option was scratched before the first NSC meeting. All the other options he characterized as a "recipe for continued and expanded war."

As Ellsberg described it, Mr. Nixon initially developed a plan directed at "coercing the Russians" into pressuring North Vietnam to a settlement. In part this plan included the three military steps and in part the President's "conciliatory" speech of May 14, 1969. Ellsberg said that Kissinger called in Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin to tell him at the time of the speech that if the Russians don't produce a settlement we

would escalate the war." Ellsberg said Moscow and Hanoi knew of the three military steps but they were withheld from the American public.

McCloskey told newsmen that in the September after the May speech, he and Rep. Donald W. Riegle Jr. (R-Mich.) asked Kissinger whether the initial secret plan to end the war had worked and that Kissinger replied, "no." Kissinger he added, told them the administration then was embarked on a second plan, which included the first troop withdrawal announcement. Ellsberg said the initial idea of "coercing" the Russians had been abandoned after May, 1969.

As to the initial "signal" about the possible mining of Haiphong, Ellsberg said a secret study made in early 1969 concluded that even if the harbor were totally closed sufficient supplies could reach North Vietnam by other water and land routes. Ellsberg said he once had done a similar study, with similar conclusions, for Robert S. McNamara, when he was Defense Secretary. President Nixon did order the mining of Haiphong on May 8 of this year.

Ellsberg said he was disclosing for the first time the account of Navy frogmen penetrating Haiphong. He said the initial B-52 bombing in Cambodia had been reported in the New York Times in March or April, 1969, and that the Vietnam Veterans Against the War earlier this year had disclosed the Marine ground operations that he said occurred sometime before the end of March, 1969. The Nixon administration never confirmed either report.

[Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas last month halted the trial of Ellsberg and Anthony Russo on conspiracy, espionage and theft charges, pending a high court decision whether to consider a defense appeal over government wiretapping of a consultant connected with the case.]